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September 11, 1981

MEMORANDUM TO THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

SUBJECT: Federal Information Centers

Many Federal agencies operate or sponsor "information centers," or similar activities such as clearinghouses, information analysis centers, and resource centers. These activities collect, maintain, and make available information, usually on particular subjects or disciplines. Most are established in response to statutory requirements or program needs, and their information services are usually available to both the public and private sectors.

Many of these information centers serve a legitimate government function and provide benefits to many sectors of our society. For example, the dissemination of research information fosters the application of scientific achievements to society's needs. Similarly, the development of an informed consumer public through the dissemination of accurate and timely information can sometimes provide an alternative to greater government regulation of the marketplace.

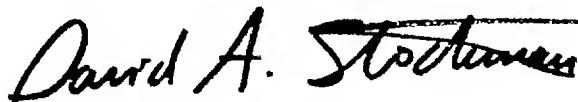
Federal agencies have a responsibility to ensure that Federal information resources are efficiently and effectively managed. The General Accounting Office and others have identified instances where the Federal Government is providing information services which are available from the private sector. In other cases, the government provides information services without charge or at less than full cost, thereby impeding the ability of the private sector to provide such services. Finally, there is evidence which suggests the existence of unnecessary duplication and overlap among centers sponsored or operated by Federal agencies.

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 and OMB Bulletin No. 81-21, your staff is now preparing a plan for implementing information resources management. The plan will include a schedule for periodic reviews of agency information activities by your agency's senior official for information resources management. In preparing this plan and schedule, I ask that you pay special attention to the major information centers operated or sponsored by your agency. In particular, you should evaluate each center with significant resource or programmatic implications. Among the criteria that should be considered in such an evaluation are the following:

- Does the center serve a legitimate and necessary government function?
- Does the information service duplicate similar services provided by other public or private organizations?
- Could the private sector provide the same or similar information services?
- Can the center be consolidated with similar services provided by other Federal organizations?
- Is the information service provided on a full-cost recovery basis? If not, what are the benefits to the public, or the government, of providing the service at less than full cost?

If your September 1 plan for implementing information resources management does not include a schedule for reviewing your agency's information centers, you should submit an addendum. Please let us know when it will be available.

My staff will be in touch with your agency's senior official for information resources management shortly to discuss this issue in further detail.



David A. Stockman  
Director